

## FLOWERS OF THE SLUMS

CHILDREN WITH BEAUTIFUL FACES FOUND IN THE RUCK  
OF THE EAST SIDE.

Photos by the Tonnelle Co.

FROM every point of view except the aesthetic the slum child has been described, yet it will not surprise any one who has done settlement work on the east side of New York city to be told that rare types of beauty are to be found more than occasionally among the children of the poor. This fact ought not to surprise anybody who remembers that nearly all the civilized races, so called, of the world are represented in that pile-mole. That children who exhibit refined features, well shaped hands and feet, and an equal number in a word, all the marks the world has become accustomed to regard as signs of "race," are likewise to be found there may excite more incredulity, but it is true, nevertheless.

Whether or not she is capricious or governed by a mysterious law of selection, Nature is as apt to rear her human flower in unexpected places as she is to hang her most delicate orchid out of sight of admiration. On stony, or at least unfruitful, ground she frequently produces plants that rival the blooms wherein she has had the help of man. Whitechapel and Mayfair, the Bowery and Millionaires' Row are the same to her. She is as likely to produce a human rose or lily in one place as the other.

This has been the story of human loveliness in every part of the world, and, in fact, that story generalized would seem to demonstrate that Nature prefers the soil of poverty in which to rear her choicest human specimens, for nearly all of those wonderfully lovely women whose names history has preserved for no other reason than that they were so lovely sprang from a lowly origin and from parents who had no more claim to beauty than their neighbors.

All the same, it would take more than a few citations from memoirs to satisfy the

mothers of Murray Hill and Fifth Avenue that it is possible for children bred in Hester and Chrystie streets to equal in beauty and attractiveness their own petted darlings. Whether or not a few photographs, taken without any special selection, will shake their conviction that all beauty belongs to wealth and aristocracy remains to be seen.

## Nature's Average

It must be admitted, too, that taking children en masse from a private school on the upper west side and an equal number from the recreation rooms of a settlement, a greater proportion of good looks will be found among the children of the rich, but in this comparison so many other things enter into the account that it rarely proves anything. Far easier is it to show that a discovery of beauty so pronounced that it startles is usually made when it has a chance to startle-down in the slums. The visitor does not look for it there, is not seeking for it, so that stumbling on it he cannot but exclaim. But in reality he need not be so surprised, for this is only one of Nature's ways of striking an average.

The slum child, after the recipe of current magazine fiction, is always miserably lacking in creature comforts, and her cleverness is invariably projected from a background of want and woe. Dirt and squalor seem to be necessary elements of the traditional slum story, and persons who do not know the crowded east side except as they read of it between magazine covers would scarcely believe in the existence there of pampered and petted children, the "flowers of the slum." Yet these little ones do exist as well as their unfortunate brothers and sisters whom the writers seize on for their efforts, and if they do not wear as costly clothing as the little children of the rich, and, happily for them-

selves, do not feed on so many dainties, yet they are well fed and carefully nourished and their garments are clean and whole.

Parental devotion is not confined to one section of a city, and the little ones who have poor and hard working fathers and mothers feel no deprivation because their homes are in Chrystie or Rivington streets, while even in other quarters whose very names call forth shudders from the people who have never been below Fourteenth street the children of the poor are not always rightfully objects of anybody's pity. They have their warm clothing for winter, their finery for summer, they have schools, baths, plenty to eat, but more than all, and including all, they have the love and care of their parents, which is quite as jealous and far sighted as that which surrounds the children of Fifth Avenue. This is the other side of the "slum" picture which naturally isn't turned to the reading public by writers who must at any cost get their effect.

Both sides of the picture may be shown without fear of forcing back the springs of

charity, for there is wretchedness enough certainly in the east side to cause it to flow, but poverty, like wealth, has degrees and the frugal poor everywhere have one aim, which is to bring up their children as if they were sure to enjoy an easier life than their parents, free from care and swayed by long lashes, over which arch and smiled on by a warm sun.

To that end they give them every possible advantage, often blinding themselves to do it, and since education is generally supposed to be the door opening to wider possibilities and a different environment, who shall say that they are not wise? There are too many living examples of men and women whose beginnings were in slumland and who have raised themselves out of it into aristocratic surroundings to make it possible to quell the ambition of these poor east side people. This being so, it is not wonderful that we should find happy childhood growing up among wretched outcasts, nor strange that one should be able to cull a bouquet of pretty human flowers from the ruck and muck of the slum.

The artists have long since found inspiration from the pretty children of Slavonic and Latin origin who may be found in the slums, but they will one and all tell you that to get one of them to sit as a model is as difficult, perhaps more difficult, than to go into the drawing rooms and select there examples of exquisite childhood. Flattered though the father and mother may be, their suspicions are easily aroused and they are quick to interpose objections. But those artists who have in them a vein of poetry and a strain of imagination are not to be turned from this rich field.

These types of strange and peculiar beauty haunt the poetic painter who has once seen them, so that he must go back again and again, unless he has succeeded in translating them in his own terms of color. One type, found most frequently in the Russian child, is so strange as to appear unreal. With hair of burnished gold this type of passionate yet melancholy childhood has dark, fathomless eyes, swept by long lashes, over which arch delicate brows. Her expression is so close and brooding that it seems fantastic, and in fact, when one becomes enough acquainted with children of this type, it takes very little imagination to confound their odd reserve with a melancholy view of life. Of course, this is far fetched, but for all that these little beauties, like the "Yetta" of the picture, are strange children, with an abiding atmosphere of mystery and a humanity that is curiously remote.

Far removed from "Yetta" is the ebullient child of the blond Latin type. She feels all the emotions and expresses them exactly as they come to her. There is rarely anything pathetic about this type of child, and when the "slum" writers chose her for a subject they invariably degenerate into mawkishness and twaddle. Occasionally one finds in the slums a child whose facial traits are so striking and whose coloring is so brilliant as to be rightly called "theatrical." It need hardly be explained that this is not the term employed by the Russo-Jewish families who know her. Among them she is treated, as far as circumstances permit, as the same kind of a child would be by foolish and commonplace parents everywhere. The result is the same—a spoiled darling, with one eye always on her own appetites and their immediate gratifications. Perhaps it will be said that a strain is apparent in this effort to show that growing up in the slums, but protected and guarded, are little human flowers as pretty, delicate and even aristocratic in the broad sense of the word, as any that bloom in the mansions of the rich. There is no justice in this criticism, as the workers on the east side, who are frank, will be the first to admit. Certain advantages over what the world calls the more fortunate children these little ones of the slums possess. Too many toys and too many tasks are frequently the drawbacks to progress, intellectual and moral, of rich children. They rarely escape the ill effects of too much supervision, and the little inmates of a slum nursery have their individuality smothered under custom. Whatever else they miss, these east side children grow up to be themselves, urged by a personal initiative and not trained into a common stature. If they ripen to maturity it is false sentiment that dooms them to no other fate than early disease and decay. The very reverse has often been seen, and it is quite natural to expect a happy future for these pretty flowers of the slums.